

THE BLACKWELL GUIDE TO

ARISTOTLE'S

Nicomachean

Ethics

EDITED BY RICHARD KRAUT

The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

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Abbreviations

<i>An. Post.</i>	<i>Posterior Analytics</i>
<i>An. Pr.</i>	<i>Prior Analytics</i>
<i>Cael.</i>	<i>On the Heavens</i>
<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>De An.</i>	<i>De Anima (On the Soul)</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Eudemian Ethics</i>
<i>Gen. An.</i>	<i>Generation of Animals</i>
<i>Gen. et Corr.</i>	<i>On Generation and Corruption</i>
<i>Hist. An.</i>	<i>History of Animals</i>
<i>Meta.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Magna Moralia</i>
<i>Mot. An.</i>	<i>Movement of Animals</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Part. An.</i>	<i>Parts of Animals</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Physics</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politics</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i>

Introduction

Richard Kraut

Aristotle currently occupies a privileged position in the study of moral philosophy. Along with a handful of other historical figures – Hume, Kant, Mill, and perhaps several others – he is regarded as someone whose approach to the philosophical study of ethics must be learned (though not necessarily accepted) by any serious student of the subject. More than any other philosopher from antiquity or the medieval period, he is read as someone whose framework for ethics might still be viable, or at any rate might be incorporated or transformed into a larger scheme that combines his insights with those of others. It would be foolish to think that he deserves to have the last word about any matter that he discussed, that he had no blind spots or limitations, or that he can help with every aspect of ethical inquiry. Nonetheless, in moral philosophy, he is someone with whom one must come to terms, even if one decides to become anti-Aristotelian.

Philosophical discussions of practical questions were at the center of the Academy, the school of research that Plato established in Athens in the early fourth century BC, and at which Aristotle (born in Stagira, and therefore never an Athenian citizen) arrived in 367, when he was seventeen years old. There he remained as an active participant in discussions until Plato's death twenty years later. He then left Athens and continued his philosophical and scientific studies in other parts of the Greek world. It is generally accepted that the treatise in moral philosophy for which Aristotle is best known – the *Nicomachean Ethics* – was written not during these earlier periods of his life, but some time after he returned to Athens in 334 and established his own research center in the Lyceum, just outside Athens.

There he wrote and lectured until the year before his death in 322. It is often assumed that some – perhaps many – of his philosophical treatises were delivered as lectures, or at any rate that those lectures were drawn from material that has been preserved in his written works. It is not likely that Aristotle himself was the one who gave the word “Nicomachean” to this ethical treatise. Nicomachus was

the name of his father and of his son; perhaps the son had something to do with the arrangement of the treatise named after him, but this is a matter of speculation. When Aristotle refers, in the political essays that were collected together to form his *Politics*, to points already made about ethical subjects, he calls those writings *ta ēthika* – the writings that have to do with character (*ēthos*). He does not call them *Nicomachean* – or for that matter *Eudemian* (the name of his other major work about ethical matters) – but simply *ta ēthika*, “the ethical things.” “Ethical” is, of course, the word that we now use to refer to *anything* having to do with right and wrong, good and bad, obligation and duty, and what ought to be done. When Aristotle speaks of *ta ēthika*, by contrast, he and his readers hear the root term *ēthos*, and thus they take those compositions to have states of character as their principal concern. It is easy to see why both the *Eudemian Ethics* (Eudemus was a student of Aristotle, and perhaps therefore also an editor of this work) and the *Nicomachean Ethics* should be called studies of character: the topics to which they are principally devoted are the qualities of mind that we should cultivate and praise, or avoid and blame.

It is now so widely taken for granted that “ethics” (or “moral philosophy” as it is sometimes called) is the name of a distinct branch of philosophy that we must constantly force ourselves to remember that this way of carving up the subject had to be invented, and that Aristotle was one of its inventors. Plato does not divide philosophy into ethics, political theory, epistemology, and so on. On the contrary, it is reasonable to take him to believe that philosophy is a single and unified subject, no part of which can profitably be investigated in isolation from the others – that, for example, the study of the visible cosmos in the *Timaeus* must be combined with the study of pleasure in the *Philebus*, legislation in the *Laws*, knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, and so on. Aristotle, by contrast, assumes, in writing his ethical works, that the subject under investigation has its own distinctive subject matter, that it employs a methodology peculiarly appropriate to that subject matter, and that its students need not pursue philosophical questions that lie outside the realm of ethics. In the opening pages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he calls the kind of expertise that he takes his readers to be acquiring “political” expertise, indicating that (unlike many philosophers of our time) he does not think of political theory and ethics as two separate and autonomous parts of philosophy. The *Nicomachean Ethics*, then, is conceived as the first volume of a two-volume study. If Aristotle had to give a single title to that entire two-volume work, it would be *politikē*, the study of political matters, though (to render a phrase he employs at X.9.1181b15) “the philosophy of human affairs” might better convey the scope of his inquiry. But he clearly thinks that *politikē* can also properly serve as the name of the second volume of that study, and that *ta ēthika* is a suitable name for its first volume.

Although *ta ēthika* is what he (in the *Politics*) calls his study, because so large a portion of its contents is devoted to an examination of character, he does not announce, in the opening lines of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that this will be the principal topic, or even one of the topics, to be discussed. Instead, he works his

way toward this topic. We are already well into the material of Book I before we get an indication that the study of character will occupy an important place in the rest of the work. What Aristotle begins with, instead, is the phenomenon of human striving, and the object of all of that striving: “every craft and inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to aim at something good” (*NE* I.1.1094a1–2). That initial observation is then used to build a case that good ought to be the ultimate topic of our investigation: this is what we are aiming at in all that we do, and so we will profit by having a better understanding of what it is. We are led to a study of states of character only because of the connection Aristotle seeks to establish between what is ultimately good and certain states of character. Some of those character states – the ones that are widely recognized as virtues – are good to cultivate and exercise, and deserve to be praised; others, widely recognized as defects or vices, must be avoided and blamed.

In placing what is good at the center of his ethical theory, Aristotle is following the lead of Plato, who has Socrates declare in Book VI of the *Republic* that everything we do is undertaken for the sake of the good, and that good must therefore be the highest object of philosophical study. But although Aristotle’s thinking is heavily indebted to Plato in this way, there is nonetheless a remarkable difference – one that Aristotle is eager to emphasize, in Book I, chapter 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He takes Plato and his followers to be advocating the study of a completely general study of goodness – so general that it would apply equally to anything in the universe whatsoever. The Platonist wants to know what is being said about any *X* when it is called good, or good for someone, or a good something or other. Aristotle thinks that is a pseudo-study because it seeks to bring together things that ought to be considered separately. What he proposes is that there is a single study of the *human* good. If one refuses to pay attention to features of human beings that are distinctive of them, and proceeds instead to speculate at a more abstract level, so that what one says about goodness applies no less to plants, animals, gods, good times, good places, and so on, there will be nothing worthwhile to discover. But when we pay attention to the psychology of human beings – particularly to the fact that we are capable of reasoning and responding, in our emotional life, to reasons – then we will be able to make good use of our study of what is good.

This focus on the good of *human beings* – based on the idea that our daily lives can be improved through a better understanding of *human* well-being – is precisely what gives Aristotle’s moral philosophy its distinctive character. It is a remarkably bold philosophical enterprise because it is (for all of its antipathy to Platonic abstraction) an attempt to find a theory of great generality – one that applies not just to fourth-century Greek males, but to all members of the human species – that will at the same time help us shape our political institutions and guide our political and individual decisions. It is a theory that in some way is anchored in our knowledge of the empirical world; that is, in highly general long-term facts about the sorts of creatures that human beings are. There are all sorts of good reasons for

being skeptical about whether this sort of project can succeed. One can reasonably ask whether Aristotle is guilty of making the same sort of error that he believes his Platonist friends have made: seeking too high a level of generality. Can one, in other words, discover significant truths (truths that are useful in guiding our actions) about what is good for every single human being? Why should the fact that one is a human being play a role in one's thinking about how to live one's life? Is the notion of what is good for a human being robust enough to serve as the basis for practical reasoning or does deliberation need to be guided by a much richer palate of concepts (such notions, for example, as rights, duties, and obligations) than the ones that Aristotle studies? He is the inventor of a philosophical program whose merits and deficiencies are extremely difficult to assess. That is precisely what makes him an exciting author to read. An open-minded, careful, and intelligent reader who engages with Aristotle's "philosophy of human affairs" will inevitably be confronted with some of the deepest foundational questions of ethical life.

The essays collected in this volume are published here for the first time, and collectively they present a portrait of the interpretive and philosophical issues that any serious reader of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* must confront. Chris Bobonich's essay (chapter 1) emphasizes the value of also paying careful attention to Aristotle's other ethical writings, particularly his early dialogue, *Protrepticus*, and his other major ethical treatise, the *Eudemian Ethics*. Although the *Nicomachean Ethics* has long been regarded as the final and definitive statement of Aristotle's moral philosophy, and the *Eudemian Ethics* (which shares three books with its *Nicomachean* counterpart) has been neglected by all but a few specialists, there is no good reason for the radical imbalance in the attention they receive. Aristotle thought about practical problems for his whole philosophical career, and what he says about them in one work sometimes differs in important ways from what he says about them elsewhere. One cannot but have a deeper understanding of the *Nicomachean Ethics* if one goes beyond it and pays attention to Aristotle's less-studied ethical works.

Gavin Lawrence's essay (chapter 2) assesses the strengths and weaknesses of Aristotle's theory of human well-being, as that theory is expounded in Books I and X (chapters 6–8) of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He is particularly concerned with two questions. First, when Aristotle asks his audience to consider whether human beings have an *ergon* (often translated "function"), and goes on to argue that they do – namely, to exercise the reasoning and reason-responsive parts of the soul – is he committing a fundamental error by leaping over a gap that can never legitimately be crossed: a gap between facts and values, or between what is prudentially valuable and what is morally admirable? Second, when Aristotle returns to the topic of well-being in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and gives a series of arguments designed to show that the happiest life (that is, the most *eudaimon* life) belongs to someone who spends much time exercising theoretical excellence, is he bringing himself into conflict with the main lines of his ethical theory? There

would be no conflict if Aristotle were merely saying that contemplation (the exercise of theoretical reason) is one among many worthwhile reasoning or reason-governed activities; but in Book X, chapters 7–8 he seems to be giving it a special, indeed an exalted, position, making it somehow the pinnacle of a well-lived life. Lawrence finds that ideal problematic, but argues that this does not reveal any flaw in Aristotle’s fundamental starting-point: to find out what counts as living well, we must “look to basic facts about the kind of creatures we are and the sort of world we live in.”

Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* moves back and forth between a first-order inquiry into the nature of the human good and second-order reflections on the proper method for carrying out such an inquiry. Aristotle warns his audience not to expect more from his arguments than his subject matter allows: he cannot give them mathematical precision, and he expects his arguments to be acceptable only to those who have already been brought up in good habits. Yet he does take himself to be answerable to appropriate standards of good reasoning. Many of these standards are set forth in Book I, but an extremely important component of Aristotle’s methodology is not made explicit until a much later point in his treatise (Book VII, chapter 1). That “endoxic” or “dialectical” method is the subject of my contribution to this volume (chapter 3).

The principal thesis of Book I is that since the human good, *eudaimonia*, consists in excellent or virtuous exercises of our powers as creatures who reason and respond to reasons, a more concrete specification of what that good is requires an examination of what those excellent or virtuous qualities of mind are. It is to that more concrete specification of the human good that Aristotle turns in the closing chapter of Book I, which serves as an introduction to the discussion of virtues that occupies Books II–VI. Aristotle has both a general theory about what sorts of states of mind the virtues are and a more detailed account of particular qualities of mind that he takes to be virtues – such qualities as courage, generosity, justice, and so on. But both the general theory of virtue and the concrete portraits of particular virtues are informed by something that has come to be called “the doctrine of the mean” (though Aristotle simply refers to virtues as states that lie in and aim at a mean – “*doctrine* of the mean” does not correspond to any phrase he uses). He claims that it is of practical value to recognize the intermediacy of the virtues, but it is far from clear what he has in mind. Rosalind Hursthouse’s essay (chapter 4) argues that there is no truth in this “doctrine” as it is ordinarily understood, but that nonetheless we should recognize several great insights within Aristotle’s discussion. Properly understood, Aristotle’s principal contribution, in his treatment of the virtues, is to describe the many ways in which we can go astray in our efforts to do the right thing, and of the role played by the emotions in guiding or misguiding our deliberations. To go astray in life is to fail to acquire the skills we need to keep our emotional and cognitive resources in balance.

Although anyone who is familiar with Aristotle’s moral philosophy recognizes how important it is to him that the virtues are intermediate states, there is another

recurring theme in his discussion of the virtues that can easily be overlooked, partly because he does so little to explain the significance of that theme. The term *kalon*, which can be translated “beautiful,” “fine,” or “noble,” depending on the context, pervades Aristotle’s practical philosophy, and has an especially important role to play in his discussion of the virtues. What is *kalon* is, in some way, the aim of every virtuous action (*NE* III.7.1115b12); this is a point that is made throughout Aristotle’s discussion of individual virtues, but it is difficult to know what it means. Gabriel Richardson Lear (chapter 5) proposes that Aristotle conceives of virtuous actions as possessing a special kind of beauty. People of excellent character take pleasure in the public performance of fine deeds because these acts exhibit a kind of proportionality, just as the beautiful works of certain craftsmen are so well balanced that nothing can properly be added to or taken away from them. The fineness of virtuous activity, then, is of a piece with the intermediacy of virtue.

It should be clear that for Aristotle praiseworthiness and blameworthiness are important categories of practical thought, and enter into the outlook of any mature human being. Human beings of good character do not act well merely in order to be praised, and do not refrain from wrongdoing merely in order to avoid blame; nonetheless they are not indifferent to praise, and they know when praise and blame are deserved – not just in their own case, but in general. Blame and culpability are especially important to an ethical theory as deeply implicated in politics as Aristotle’s, and so it is not surprising – given the overt political orientation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – that he pays so much attention, in Book III, to working out a theory of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. As Susan Sauvé Meyer emphasizes in chapter 6, our understanding of this aspect of Aristotle’s moral philosophy is greatly enhanced when we compare the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean* treatments of it. Reading the two discussions together helps us see that Aristotle does not embrace the thesis that one is responsible for one’s actions only if one is responsible for one’s character. Her analysis should be compared with Chris Bobonich’s discussion of the relationship between Aristotle’s two major ethical treatises.

It would be difficult to appreciate Aristotle’s conception of ethical virtue without absorbing oneself in the details of his discussion of particular virtues, and certainly none of his little essays on those individual character traits creates as much difficulty for a modern reader as does his discussion of *megalopsuchia* (literally “greatness of soul,” but also translated as “magnanimity” or “pride”). Aristotle describes this virtue as an “adornment” of the other virtues, in that it makes all of them greater (*NE* IV.3.1124a1): here, once again, the aesthetic aspect of Aristotelian virtue comes to the fore. And yet, what are we to make of someone who takes himself to be worthy of great things, who is ashamed when he receives benefits from others, and wishes to be superior to others? Roger Crisp’s essay (chapter 7) surveys the many and seemingly disparate characteristics that Aristotle attributes to the great-souled person, and considers whether we have good reason to object to any of them. Like Gabriel Richardson Lear, he finds in Aristotle an ideal of moral

beauty – or, as he puts it, “nobility” – that fits uncomfortably with modern moral sensibilities. But that seemingly alien aspect of Aristotle’s ethics makes reading him all the more worthwhile; it forces us to ask whether we can justifiably have disdain for greatness of soul.

No virtue receives greater attention from Aristotle than justice. He devotes the whole of Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to it, and justifies assigning it so large a space by citing the proverb “in justice is the sum of all virtue” (V.1.1129b29–30). Without calling attention to his disagreement with Plato, who proposes in the *Republic* that *dikaiosunē* can be given a single definition, Aristotle takes it for granted that this is really the name for two virtues: by calling someone “just,” we may mean either that he is lawful or that he is fair and equal (both “fair” and “equal” are used as translations of *isos*). The first half of Aristotle’s analysis – *dikaiosunē* as lawfulness – invites the question of whether he is talking about our virtue of *justice*, and the further question of whether he has a greater respect for law than he should. But the second half – *dikaiosunē* as equality or fairness – should assure us that his discussion of at least this aspect of *dikaiosunē* has as its topic the virtue that we call justice. Charles Young (chapter 8) proposes, in fact, that we can find some striking similarities between Aristotelian justice as equality and some familiar ideas of contemporary political philosophy. There is, he argues, a notion of impartiality built into Aristotle’s conception of justice. It “invites us, in conducting our relations with others, to assume a perspective from which we view ourselves and . . . others as members of a community of free and equal human beings, and to decide what to do from that perspective.”

In Book VI, Aristotle, having completed his discussion of the virtues of character, carries out a survey of the virtues of thought – technical skill (*technē*), scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), and understanding (*nous*). One of the principal goals of this book, as Aristotle indicates in its opening chapter, is to give his audience a firmer grip on the kind of person one should aim to become, as one avoids the extremes of excess and deficiency in one’s actions and emotions. What sort of person is that? Someone who has practical wisdom, and ideally someone whose practical wisdom is used in the service of philosophy – the activity that gives fullest expression to the virtues of theoretical inquiry. Aristotle discusses technical skill here only in order to emphasize the ways in which the other virtues of thought are superior to it. The center of his attention in Book VI is the virtue of practical wisdom, a quality of mind that governs the emotions by making use of clever instrumental reasoning, excellent non-routinized deliberation about the proper and ultimate ends of life, and perception of particular facts that play a telling role in decision-making. C. D. C. Reeve (chapter 9) emphasizes the striking difference between this approach to reasoned practical thought and one that seeks a single dominant value that must, in every circumstance, be maximized.

Several of the themes explored in this essay – the apparently limited scope of deliberation, the interdependence of ethical virtue and practical wisdom, and the

dependency of action upon perception (and of good action on perception informed by virtue) – are also investigated in the essay of Paula Gottlieb (chapter 10). She places special emphasis, however, on what she takes to be one of Aristotle’s best discoveries: that just as we can study the elements of good theoretical reasoning (the theoretical syllogism), so too we can investigate the ingredients that lead to good action by way of a *practical* syllogism. One of the premises of such a syllogism, she argues, must refer to the character of the agent. So a practical syllogism, properly formulated, will reveal how this kind of person, using both an assumption about some end to be sought, and further assumptions about what someone of this type should do in these circumstances to achieve that end, was led to perform this concrete act. Practical thinking, so conceived, is shot through with particularities and generalities of various kinds. “A practical syllogism with all general terms,” as Gottlieb points out, “could not be practical, and it is no small achievement on Aristotle’s part to grasp this point.”

Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is devoted to two independent topics. Its last four chapters (11–14) ask about the nature and value of pleasure, a topic that is then taken up once again in Book X, chapters 1–5. (The treatment of pleasure in Book VII belongs as well to the *Eudemian Ethics*. So one can say either that the editorial process that led to the *Nicomachean Ethics* was sloppy, because of this inelegant repetition; or wise, because the treatise is enhanced by including two discussions of pleasure.) But the bulk of this book (chapters 1–10) is devoted to states of character that deviate from virtue, though not in the same way as the defects of character studied in Books II–V. The most important of these deviations are *akrasia* (“incontinence,” “lack of self-control,” “weakness of will,” or sometimes left untranslated and Latinized: *acrasia*) and *enkrateia* (“continence,” “self-control,” “strength of will”). The *akratēs* (who suffers from *akrasia*) and the *enkratēs* (who possesses *enkrateia*) see, in some way or other, what they should aim at and what they should do here and now. They are therefore better human beings than those who are in error about what their ends should be. But, at the same time, there is something in them, caused by a desire or emotion, that opposes their recognition of what they should do here and now; and, in the case of the *akratēs*, this opposing factor leads all the way to action. One of the puzzles about Aristotle’s examination of these states of minds, as A. W. Price emphasizes in chapter 11, is whether he acknowledges the existence of what Price calls “hard *akrasia*,” that is, a clear-eyed recognition, undiminished by any cognitive weakness, that one should not now be doing what one is in fact doing. Does the *akratēs* really recognize that what he is doing right now is not what he should do, or is his thinking in some way dimmed because of his desires or emotions? The traditional interpretation, which Price discusses and compares with various alternatives, holds that, according to Aristotle, some intellectual failure accompanies every case in which someone acts against his better judgment.

The second main topic of Book VII – pleasure – is one that occupies Plato in several dialogues (it is the principal topic of his *Philebus*, but also plays an impor-

tant role in *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Republic*). But a thesis to which he gives voice in the *Protagoras*, and combats in all of his other works – that pleasure is the proper and sole ultimate end of human beings – gathered strength in spite of his opposition to it, and became the guiding ethical principle of the Epicurean school, which was established in Athens one generation after the death of Aristotle. Hedonism was revived in the modern era, and the leading utilitarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill) embraced it. But there is now a consensus among philosophers that the equation of good and pleasure is too simple. What role, then, should pleasure play in our lives? As Dorothea Frede (chapter 12) argues, if we want to acknowledge the great value of pleasure and its strength as a psychological factor, but also want to deny that it should be the ultimate aim of all that we do, we can do no better than look to Aristotle's discussion in Books VII and X for help. Aristotle looks for a way of showing that although pleasure is *a* good – that in fact it should be woven into everything of value – it is not *the* good, because it is by its very nature not suited to be a goal. As Frede says, "That our actions should be done *with* inclination rather than *because* of inclination is an insight that should never have dropped out of moral discourse."

It is a remarkable feature of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that such a large part of it – two of its ten books – is devoted to *philia* (friendship). Plato treats this subject in one of his short dialogues (*Lysis*), but his fuller discussions of social affiliation are about erotically charged relationships (*Symposium* and *Phaedrus*). Aristotle, by contrast, has little interest in *erōs*. He assumes that nearly all of our interactions with other human beings are not erotic, but that many of the people we encounter – all but those whom we actively dislike – are, in some way and to some degree, dear (*philos*) to us. To study *philia*, then, is to study an extremely wide variety of human relationships, ranging from the intimacy of family relationships and close comrades, to the cooler ties of fellow citizens, friendly strangers, and business associates. One of the remarkable features of Aristotle's discussion of *philia* is that he is able to use his theory of virtue, and his conception of its centrality to a well-lived life, to classify and understand the value of this wide variety of human relationships. Jennifer Whiting (chapter 13) calls our attention to the many ways in which Aristotle's discussion of friendship extends and complicates his moral psychology. He emphasizes the importance of not treating other human beings as mere instruments – for one should benefit one's friends for *their* sake – but at the same time seems to find a kind of self-love behind every virtuous action. Whiting's goal is to find the coherence in Aristotle's blending of apparent egoism and altruism.

Aristotle's examination of friendship is followed by a second discussion of pleasure. (It is noteworthy that it does not refer to Book VII's discussion.) He then returns, in Book X, chapter 6, to the unfinished business of the whole treatise. Although he noted, in Book I, that three kinds of lives are thought especially attractive – a life of pleasure, a political life, and a life devoted to philosophical

study and contemplation – he has not yet compared the merits of these last two kinds of lives. We know, from his discussions of pleasure, why this should not be our goal, and he downgrades pleasure (or, at any rate, a certain kind of pleasure) once again, in Book X, chapter 6, by arguing that amusement should always be subordinate to more serious matters. In the next two chapters, he turns to the comparison of two kinds of lives – one philosophical, the other political – and affirms the superiority of the life of philosophical contemplation. And yet the final chapter of his treatise insists that we must continue this study of ethical virtues by seeing how these qualities of mind can be sustained and enhanced through legislation. Having affirmed the inferiority of the political life to that of the philosopher, Aristotle nonetheless urges the members of his audience to acquire a detailed understanding of the varieties of political systems and the various factors that preserve and destroy them. But as Malcolm Schofield (chapter 14) points out, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is shot through with the idea that ethics and politics are inseparable. From the very start, Aristotle takes himself to be addressing people who want to take part in politics. He several times affirms the political nature of human beings, and repeatedly emphasizes the political dimensions of many of the virtues (courage is primarily a military quality, justice is lawfulness, and the virtues that have to do with wealth and honor are exercised primarily in the civic arena). The *Nicomachean Ethics*, unlike its *Eudemian* counterpart, is framed by its political orientation.

One of the many ways in which we can try to learn from Aristotle's moral philosophy is to locate him in a narrative about the history of ethics – a story that might involve decline, or progress, or both, depending on how it is told. We can ask, for example: are the concepts that play an important role in modern moral philosophy ones that have exact or close parallels in ancient ethics? If Aristotle thinks about ethics in a way that differs markedly from the way in which we do, is that because we have lost touch with certain insights, or is it because he lived in a social world that we are well rid of? T. H. Irwin's essay (chapter 15) reminds us, however, that we must not impoverish our understanding of the history of ethics by thinking only in terms of an ancient/modern contrast: that would omit the richness of moral philosophy in the medieval period, and in particular it would lose sight of the ways in which Aquinas appropriates and develops Aristotle's ideas. By showing how Aquinas places Aristotle's conception of well-being into a framework of natural law, the validity of which is independent of divine or human will, Irwin challenges the thesis, endorsed by G. E. M. Anscombe, that in Aristotle we find no notion of moral requirement because that concept makes sense only if there is a legislator, divine or human, who determines what is required. According to Irwin, the common view that the Greeks lack a juridical conception of ethics, and that Christianity laid the groundwork for a radically different philosophical framework, should be rejected in favor of a more complex narrative that emphasizes continuity and development.

Sarah Broadie (chapter 16) brings this volume to a close with a salutary warning: because so much of what Aristotle says is “extraordinarily sensible as well as illuminating,” and so much of it rightly shapes our thinking today, we can all too easily slip into thinking that “in this or that important modern debate there is a theory of which Aristotle holds a version, or a side which he is recognizably on.” On the contrary, she insists: “Many of our own central preoccupations in ethics are with questions on which, for one or another reason, Aristotle has little or nothing to say.” In particular, she argues, we must not look to the *Nicomachean Ethics* for a justification for doing what is right, or for a method – conveyed by a formula or a series of rules – for making better day-to-day decisions. She also notes that, although much that Aristotle wrote about continues to provoke debate, there are other topics that preoccupied him but have, for no good reason, disappeared from our intellectual agenda. The proper use of leisure, for example, is no longer a subject of philosophical inquiry, though Aristotle considered it a topic of great importance. Several other contributors to this volume – for example, Gavin Lawrence and Dorothea Frede – come to the same conclusion in their essays. We should look to Aristotle not only for tools that help with current ethical problems, but also for a framework that unsettles our all-too-familiar philosophical agenda. He can change our conception of what the study of ethics should be.

1

Aristotle's Ethical Treatises

Chris Bobonich

The *Nicomachean Ethics* is by far the best known of Aristotle's ethical works, but it is not the only one that has come down to us. We also have the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Magna Moralia* (the *Great Ethics*), and fragments of the *Protrepticus* (*Exhortative*). Before turning to their philosophic contents and the controversies that have arisen about them, however, we must consider some important philological questions concerning their authenticity, their chronology, and the relations of dependence among these texts.

Background

Roughly speaking, we can divide Aristotle's writings into two main groups: the "school-writings" and the more popular writings. The school-writings include all the texts that are commonly studied by scholars and students today, such as the *Categories*, *De Anima*, the *Metaphysics*, the *Physics*, and the *Politics*, as well as the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Magna Moralia*, and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. (They include everything in the Revised Oxford Translation of Aristotle except for the *Constitution of the Athenians* and the Fragments which include parts of the *Protrepticus*.) These texts, in general, lack the polish that we would expect from works intended for an audience outside Aristotle's school, the Lyceum. They are usually thought to be the notes from which Aristotle himself lectured or which he circulated in the Lyceum (or, less plausibly, students' notes of Aristotle's lectures). Scholars have staked out the possible extreme positions; that is, that all these texts are by Aristotle, or that none is, as well as a variety of positions in between. Nevertheless, there is a fairly solid consensus that most of these are by Aristotle, and a similar consensus about which of the transmitted texts are inauthentic.¹ Unfortunately for us, there are serious doubts about the *Magna Moralia* and the *Protrepticus*, and, to a much lesser extent, the *Eudemian Ethics*.

From references in Cicero, and many other Greek and Roman sources, we know that Aristotle also wrote works, many of them dialogues, intended for a broader audience outside the Lyceum. They include several that share their name with a Platonic dialogue; for example, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Symposium*. The *Protrepticus* falls into this more popular category, although it is not clear whether it was a dialogue. Unfortunately, it is the only one of these works of which we have substantial portions.²

There are ancient stories in Strabo (64 BC–c.21 A) and Plutarch (c.50–c.120 A) that Aristotle's school-writings were not available even to the Lyceum from the time of the death of Theophrastus around 285 BC (Aristotle's successor as head of the Lyceum) until some time in the first century BC. They were then edited and published in Rome by Andronicus of Rhodes, perhaps after various losses and dislocations of the text, and it is from this edition that our present corpus of Aristotle derives. Scholarly opinion is divided on the accuracy of this story, although few think it is entirely without basis. There is also a growing inclination to think that some of the school-writings were known between Theophrastus and Andronicus and that the sources of Andronicus' edition were more complex than Strabo and Plutarch suggest (see Düring 1957; Moraux 1973–2001; Sandbach 1985; Barnes and Griffin 1997; Frede 1997; Long 1998). These difficulties in the history of Aristotle's texts help explain the transmission of some inauthentic works as well as the loss of some authentic ones. But they also help explain another noteworthy feature of Aristotle's corpus: a number of what we now treat as single works were not put together in their present form by Aristotle (this is clearly true of the *Metaphysics* and may be true of the *Politics*) and any part of them may have undergone repeated revision by Aristotle.

Protrepticus

We have three ancient catalogues of Aristotle's writings: that in Diogenes Laertius (probably third century A), that in the "Anonymus Menagii" (probably Hesychius of Miletus, fifth century A), and that in two thirteenth-century Arab writers which is attributed to a certain "Ptolemy" (whose identification remains disputed). In all of these, there is a reference to a work called the *Protrepticus* which is no longer extant. A *protrepticus logos* (of which we have other ancient examples) is a speech or discourse (*logos*) which aims at turning (*trepō*) the reader toward (*pro*) a certain way of living. There are explicit references to it in Stobaeus (latter half of the fifth century A) and in several Aristotelian commentators. From these, we learn that the *Protrepticus* was directed to Themison, a king of the Cypriots, and encouraged him to pursue philosophy. Our sources also report an argument from it roughly of the form that to settle rationally the question of whether one ought to philosophize one must investigate whether philosophy exists and whether it should be pursued. But this inquiry is itself a form of philosophizing so that one is rationally required to philosophize.

There was relatively little else to go on in establishing the text of the *Protrepticus*. In 1869, however, Ingram Bywater made the crucial suggestion that chapters 5–12 of the *Protrepticus* of the Neo-Platonist Iamblichus (c.250–330 A) contain extensive excerpts from Aristotle’s own *Protrepticus*.³ In 1961, Ingemar Düring published a reconstruction of the text of Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* based overwhelmingly on Iamblichus. Düring isolates from Iamblichus over 5,000 words that he argues can be accepted as probably genuine fragments of Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*. Scholars have disagreed over how secure the attribution of these texts to Aristotle is, but there is considerable agreement that Iamblichus preserves much authentic material.⁴ Scholars also generally agree that the *Protrepticus* is an earlier work of Aristotle’s, and some reasonable grounds have been given for dating it to around 350 BC. (Aristotle was born in 384 BC, came to Athens at around the age of seventeen to study at Plato’s Academy, and remained there until Plato’s death in 347 BC.) In my discussion of the *Protrepticus* below, I shall accept the fragments from chapters 6–12 of Iamblichus as containing much genuine Aristotle, even if the debate has not yet been conclusively settled. Since the case for the authenticity of these fragments is strong enough to persuade many good scholars and since the *Protrepticus* has received little discussion in the past forty years, it seems worthwhile to try to bring it into dialogue with Aristotle’s other ethical writings.

Eudemean Ethics and Nicomachean Ethics

The *Nicomachean Ethics* exists in ten books, the *Eudemean Ethics* in eight (some editors combine what others treat as Books VII and VIII to make seven books in total). There are three shared or “common books”: *EE* IV = *NE* V (on justice), *EE* V = *NE* VI (on intellectual virtue), and *EE* VI = *NE* VII (on pleasure). The common books thus include two of the most discussed books in Aristotle’s ethical thought: that on intellectual virtue, including its discussion of “practical wisdom” (*phronēsis*), and that on pleasure, including its discussion of incontinence or *akrasia*. From the time of Aspasius (the author of the first surviving commentary on Aristotle’s ethics, written in the first half of the second century A), the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the common books has attracted the lion’s share of attention. (The situation before Aspasius is more controversial.) As Anthony Kenny (1978: 1) points out: “since the Middle Ages commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* have appeared about once a decade; the *Eudemean Ethics* has received only four commentaries in its whole history.”⁵ Indeed, the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the common books might well be the most analyzed text in the history of Western philosophy. The *Eudemean Ethics*, despite some recent work, remains comparatively neglected. There are, for example, few, if any, modern editions of the *Eudemean Ethics* that print its full text along with the common books.

In the nineteenth century, under the influence of Schleiermacher and Spengel, scholars generally held that the *Eudemean Ethics* was inauthentic. But in the twen-

tieth century, its authenticity was defended by Case and, most influentially, in 1923 by Werner Jaeger in *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development*. (This was the seminal work for the study of Aristotle's development and I shall discuss some of Jaeger's views below.)

Yet even among those who accepted the authenticity of the *Eudemian Ethics*, it was generally held that: (a) it is earlier than the *Nicomachean Ethics*; (b) the *Nicomachean Ethics* is by far the philosophically superior work; and (c) the common books had their original and proper home in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (although there was more disagreement over this point than the first two). But, in 1978, Anthony Kenny challenged all three claims drawing on internal evidence, evidence about the knowledge of these works by other writers, stylometric analysis (the quantitative study of features of style), and arguments about their philosophical content. Kenny suggested that the *Eudemian Ethics* with the common books was the canonical work by Aristotle on ethics. The *Nicomachean Ethics* was formed by transferring the common books from the *Eudemian Ethics* to fill out a truncated text or incomplete set of lectures that constituted the *Nicomachean Ethics* without the common books.

Scholarly reaction to Kenny's work has been mixed: he has persuaded few that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is earlier than the *Eudemian Ethics*, but a majority may now think that the common books were originally part of the *Eudemian Ethics*.⁶ Nevertheless, philosophers and scholars still overwhelmingly take the *Nicomachean Ethics* as their focus. In my discussion below, I shall assume that the *Eudemian Ethics* is genuine and consider some of the issues that arise from reading its five books together with the three common books.

Magna Moralia

Finally, let us turn to the *Magna Moralia*. It consists of two long books (the first has thirty-four chapters, the second has seventeen) and is roughly the size of the *Eudemian Ethics* without the common books. Its structure and contents bear a close resemblance to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but especially to the *Eudemian Ethics*. There are no known ancient or medieval commentaries on it and the *Magna Moralia* has suffered from even greater neglect than the *Eudemian Ethics*.

There is also considerably more doubt about its authenticity. In the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher, somewhat eccentrically, held that it was the only genuine ethical work by Aristotle. Its authenticity was rejected by Jaeger, Walzer, Brink and, more recently, by Kenny and Rowe. It has been accepted as genuine, at least in important parts, by von Arnim, Dirlmeier (in a change of mind), and, more recently, by Düring and Cooper.⁷

The critics have especially pointed to: (a) features of style that seem unAristotelian and in some case indicative of late origin (for example, terminology claimed to derive from Theophrastus or the Stoics); (b) internal references inconsistent

with Aristotle's authorship; (c) inconsistencies with Aristotle's other views, especially the theology of *Metaphysics* Book XII; and (d) such a close resemblance to parts of the texts of, especially, the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (including some quotation) as to suggest that the author of the *Magna Moralia* is summarizing and condensing them.

Counter-arguments have been mounted by the defenders of the *Magna Moralia*, and perhaps the plausible defense of it suggests that it is only in part Aristotelian. John Cooper, for example, suggests that the *Magna Moralia* may well be a student's revised notes from a set of lectures given by Aristotle perhaps prior to the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (other defenders of the *Magna Moralia* think that it is based on an incomplete written text of Aristotle that has been edited and added to, perhaps heavily at times, by a later Peripatetic). There is, at this point, I think, insufficient evidence to decide definitively between some such view and the suggestion of the critics that the *Magna Moralia* is an epitome of Aristotle's ethics produced by a later Peripatetic, at any time from Theophrastus' term as head of the Lyceum (322–285 BC) to the second half of the second century BC.

Whether or not we accept, at least in part, the authenticity of the *Magna Moralia*, it seems to be a work with an independent, cohesive point of view to a lesser degree than the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, or the *Protrepticus*. At any rate, the most interesting recent work on the *Magna Moralia* consists in painstaking analyses of the fairly subtle ways in which its treatment of various ethical issues is thought to differ from that of the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For this reason, and because it is more difficult to say with confidence what differences embody Aristotle's own views, I shall focus my discussion in the rest of this chapter on the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Protrepticus*.⁸

Jaeger's developmentalism

Jaeger's 1923 book was a milestone in Aristotle studies. Previously, it was overwhelmingly the case that Aristotle's works were read as forming a single, elaborate system. Jaeger argued that, instead, we can trace a development or evolution in Aristotle's thought. In particular, Jaeger finds three stages with a trajectory of increasing distance from Plato. With respect to metaphysics, in the first, chronologically earliest stage, Aristotle accepted Plato's metaphysics, including transcendental Platonic Forms and the immortality of the soul understood in a strongly dualist way. At the same time, Aristotle did independent work in logic, broadly speaking, that was in tension with this Platonic metaphysics. In the second, more critical, stage, Aristotle rejects the existence of Platonic Forms, but still sees himself as "the renovator of Plato's supersensible philosophy." First philosophy now studies not the Forms, but the separate, non-sensible, unchanging and eternal substance that is god or the unmoved mover of *Metaphysics* Book Lambda. In the

final stage, Aristotle broadens his conception of first philosophy to include the study of sensible substances as part of the study of being as such. In this stage, Aristotle's interest in empirical research, such as the compilation of the constitutions of Greek cities and the lists of Olympic victors, occupies an increasingly large part of his work.

Similarly, Jaeger finds three stages in Aristotle's ethical thought and these stages are marked by his changing conception of *phronēsis*. (This is usually rendered as "practical wisdom" in translations of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Since it is an important question whether Aristotle's understanding of what *phronēsis* is changed during his career, I shall leave it untranslated.) The *Protrepticus* is Aristotle's "later Platonic period," in the *Eudemian Ethics* we find "reformed Platonism," and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* "late Aristotelianism" (Jaeger 1962: 231). According to Jaeger, in the *Protrepticus* Aristotle accepts the existence of Platonic Forms, and *phronēsis* here is the sole intellectual faculty relevant to practical conduct. It is understood in the "purely Platonic" way as "philosophical knowledge as such" (1962: 81–2). *Phronēsis* is a distinct faculty that grasps the eternal norms or standards provided by the Forms. The branch of knowledge concerned with practice and conduct is thus a species of theoretical science, that is, political science, and it can be as exact as geometry. In the second period, that of the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle has abandoned Platonic Forms. *Phronēsis* still grasps the highest reality and value, but this is now god in the form of the supersensible unmoved mover (1962: 239). It is this knowledge of god that provides the norm for conduct. And although Aristotle here has a more favorable view of the role of experience in thinking about matters of conduct, there is no contrast drawn between such knowledge or understanding and the exact sciences.

Such a contrast is the leitmotif of the last stage of Aristotle's ethical thought in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which makes thematic its rejection of the central ideas of the *Protrepticus*. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is a "public recantation" of the *Protrepticus'* views. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes *phronēsis* from the theoretical faculties; here it is a practical faculty concerned with what is ethically desirable and what is advantageous for the agent. It does not have "the highest and most valuable things in the universe for [its] object and . . . is not a science at all" (1962: 83). Political "science" is thus sharply opposed to the exact sciences; its propositions cannot be both universal and informative, its inferences are not exceptionless (1962: 85).

Jaeger's picture has been widely criticized: G. E. L. Owen offered an influential account in the 1960s depicting an Aristotle who moves from early radical opposition to Plato to later views that have deep Platonic affinities. Others have sketched distinct developmental views and some have suggested that Aristotle's habits of revising earlier material repeatedly throughout his career makes any developmental hypothesis precarious.⁹ Regardless of one's final evaluation of the details of Jaeger's work, it has, I think, at least two aspects of lasting significance for the study of Aristotle's ethics. First, it encourages us to be alive to the possibility that there are

distinct – and perhaps fundamentally different and inconsistent – views in Aristotle’s ethical writings. Second, Jaeger rightly focuses on Aristotle’s conception of the kind of knowledge possible in matters of conduct, including the faculty that attains it and its exactness, and the place of such knowledge in a good or happy life. I shall focus on these issues in the rest of this chapter.

Protrepticus

I shall not here attempt to sketch even in rough outline the contents or arguments of the *Protrepticus* and I shall focus on points of possible divergence from Aristotle’s other writings rather than on the many points of overlap and continuity. Even if we ultimately reject it, Jaeger’s interpretation of the *Protrepticus* remains a good way in to some of its central issues. According to Jaeger, Aristotle in the *Protrepticus* still adheres to the Platonic understanding of *phronēsis*. On this conception, *phronēsis* is “theoretical knowledge of supersensible being and practical moral insight”; it is “knowledge of true being [that] was in fact a knowledge of the pure Norms by reference to which a man should order his life” (Jaeger 1962: 239, 83). The *Protrepticus* agrees with Plato in “bas[ing] ethical action entirely on the knowledge of being” (Jaeger 1962: 84). It is not entirely clear how strong a claim Jaeger intends to make here. But let us consider a particularly robust version of this claim: the entire intellectual state sufficient for acting virtuously or correctly is constituted by the best sort of grasp or understanding of universals.¹⁰

We might well wonder whether Plato himself in fact held such a view. If Plato holds, as Aristotle typically does, that different faculties are correlated with different objects, then it seems hard to see how he could hold the robust version of this thesis. Actions and the things they involve – for example, this man, that sword – are particulars rather than universals and as such seem to require a faculty capable of grasping particulars. Even if these particulars have non-sensible properties, such as being just, they also have sensible properties that seem central to their identification and individuation. So there seems to be a need for perceptually based judgments to enter, in some way, into decisions about what to do, and this requires some perceptually based way of grasping the truth in addition to a theoretical understanding of universals.

Now, it is the case that, at least in some dialogues, Plato seems to think that once a person grasps the relevant ethical first principles, he will easily and without exception get particular judgments right. In the *Euthyphro*, for example, once a good definition of piety is in hand, Socrates will be able to “say that any action of yours or another’s that is of that kind is pious; and if it is not of that kind, that it is not” (6E6–7). In the *Protagoras*, the possession of the measuring art, which is a kind of knowledge, would “by showing us the truth, bring peace to our soul basing it on the truth and would save our life” (356D8–E2). This art, by allowing us to measure the good and bad attaching to different courses of action, allows